

mountain stream. This stretch is not too bad, but who knows what is further downstream?" But finally he agreed that we could try.

Along the river were many dead trees, bleached by the sun. We went upstream, selecting straight trunks of the proper thickness. Then we cut the logs down to twenty feet with the ax and floated them to a place where we could assemble them to make the raft. By noon we had five logs ten inches thick and two of fourteen inches. We cleared a space along the riverbank so as to have a shallow, well-protected basin, keeping each log in its floating position. The next task was to hew the logs so that they would fit one another. They held together tightly enough, the thicker ones at the outer edges. Then we cut two crossbeams, hewed deep grooves at the ends of the long logs, and fitted the crossbeams to them.

Working knee deep in the water in our basin, we noticed that the river abounded in fish. Mikhail found a piece of wire in our luggage and bent it to make a hook. This he attached to a rod with a piece of string, and before dusk he had caught a couple of fairly large fish. We were so excited by the catch and so tired that we decided to postpone assembling the raft and indulged in a luxurious feast: fish soup, quantity unlimited, with rye biscuits.

We were back at work before sunrise. I held the logs together while Mikhail lashed them to the crossbeams with the rope. Next we tightened the raft, wedging pieces of wood between the logs. In the middle we built a platform for the luggage. Then we cut half a dozen long poles of green wood to guide our craft. By evening the raft was ready. We tested it, hurling it against the boulders. The crossbars did not move.

Next morning we loaded our belongings on the platform, covered them with the deer hide, secured with sticks, took our positions at both ends of the raft, and pushed it off into the middle of the stream. The current seized the raft and threw it forward. It moved as smoothly as if we were flying in the air. Before I knew it we had passed the shoal with the corpse of our horse. The trees along the riverbanks flashed by as though seen through the window of a train. The raft did not roll—it pitched, its beam rising and falling.

The sun was bright, the air clear and fresh and full of tunes. The river wound now eastward, then westward, and I wondered how much northerly progress we had made. The mountains east of us closed in and looked grim, almost black, in striking contrast to the radiant vegetation on the left shore. We were flying along without knowing where. My knees were stiff and I could not move my legs without acute pain, but I felt that this was the most delightful journey I could imagine.